Murdoch and the Machine of Fantasy, Dissatisfaction, and Desire

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1. Introduction: Murdoch, Fantasy and Machine

Iris Murdoch frequently presents a challenge to readers through her literary works as she creates worlds where there are no heroic or evil characters, the plot never seems completely controlled and the author herself is never quiet. Her voice and her hand guide the reader into the deep crevices where fiction and reality coalesce to create art and illusion. The line between true art and elaborately drawn illusions is a thin one; furthermore, the division between fiction and life is easily blurred in the pages of a novel. As Horace states in *Ars Poetica*, a writer should produce beauty, wit and expand the human soul, "I would advise one who has learned the imitative art to look to life and manners for a model, and draw from thence living words" (477). This essay concentrates on a work that takes one to the point of such speculation, Iris Murdoch's novel, The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1984).

In literature two things must occur: the work must be written and the work must be read to gain life. Characters are as fictional as their lives, but, when their story is read, they become virtually real to the reader, and it is this event that Murdoch is transposing from the minds of her audience to the pages of her novel. Just as her audience absorbs the lives of her characters, her characters too have absorbed the lives of other characters in fiction, mythology, science, religion and art. There is a mirroring process that occurs from the reading of this novel because it is the story of what happens to a person when one develops a relationship with fiction by identifying with characters or desiring elements of characters' lives in one's own life. When a novel is exceptionally attuned with reality and yet so far removed from any realistic or plausible event, and when the reader gains knowledge and values from impractical situations and characters, there can arise a question or confusion in one's mind as to where the representation ends and where something real may be developing. It is this place in which literature is supposed to teach something about life and the search for

satisfaction, something which will guarantee the novel's immortality, and where the creation is still undoubtedly fiction, within which Murdoch fixes her characters in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine.

In a story in which the characters could not possess more outrageous lives or provide a better plot for a fictional work, Murdoch is developing an answer to the question about how fantasy and real life (the reality/world the reader inhabits) pursue and aid one another. Here I am defining fantasy in terms of the characters' propensity to conceive of happiness in terms of ready-made concepts gathered from art, myth, literature, science, psychoanalytic theory, etc. Characters use fantasy to aid their pursuit of happiness instead of looking at their unique situations and experiences to invent solutions for their problems. Murdoch is pondering the importance of the interaction and mutual support of life and fantasy; she describes the existence of the interaction as a 'machine' in which the answers become ordinary, the same for every person, and lead to more fantasies that feed the machine. The story of the novel depicts life as it interacts with fantasy from the very beginning—childhood, in which the first stirrings of the imagination, brought on by fairy tales and religious stories, develop into an individual's first fantasy, and thus desire to be fulfilled, which feeds upon itself for the rest of the individual's life as one is driven towards death.[1] "That glow of youth, the perfect object of desire" (113), here youth symbolizes a pure form of desire, simplistic and without the

[1] David Gordon describes Murdoch as a psychologist who looks for human motives and causes according to a divine-like power in terms of a mythic fate which pushes individuals beyond their will or personal choice (Gordon, 122-3.). However, in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* the myths through which the characters develop their fantasy lives are neither divine power nor entities unknown to the individual. On the contrary, the ideas obtained by books, philosophies, religions, sciences, etc. that the reader recognizes as character building components in the novel are present because the characters have made choices, they have developed personal preferences, and though these 'myths' become unconscious over time they began with a choice made by the individual. The present essay focuses on fantasy as a *choice*, based on personal preferences of the characters, which develops into an insatiable machine the characters are unable to escape *because* of their choices and their desires.

force of a lifetime of disappointment, and also the state of being yearned for by the adults when their own machines become too overwhelming.

As the present essay will describe in greater detail as it progresses, no individual can escape the machine, as it is insatiable and feeds from humanity's most basic and sought-after ideal—love. As suggested by the title of the novel, Murdoch proposes that love could be a monstrous and debilitating illusion driving humanity to live life through mechanical ideals and principles that never permits true happiness or satisfaction. As one reads The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, it becomes quite clear that the characters are searching for a particular kind of person to love and to return their love in a certain manner. However, in this search the characters find that in the fulfillment of one fantasy another one arises—a machine is created—and the characters are never finished in their pursuit of the ultimate happiness—love.

2. The Perpetuation of Fantasy and Its Satisfaction

Murdoch begins the novel with what seems like a conventional family struggling through normal stages of adjustment, and yet the characters and the story are wrapped within perpetuating layers of fantasy about love, ethics, religion, science, art and literature. The characters have enfolded their lives within these fantasies hoping to answer questions and provide instruction for living their lives. Much of the novel is comprised of the difficult journey the characters must undergo to achieve happiness, fulfillment, or (at the very least) a state of 'well-being'. However, the idea of 'well-being' becomes drastically distorted for the characters and a confusing concept for the reader as one is admitted into the chaotic world of Blaise Gavender who has transformed the lives of all the characters with his deceptions and desires. The entire cast of characters is affected by Blaise's actions: they lie for him, provide his salvation, his destruction, and ultimately they unwittingly clear up his dastardly life for him.

As the tale unfolds, or rather tangles around itself, the reader learns how deeply the characters have allowed not only other characters, but also fantasy to shape their lives. On the face of it, this seems quite remarkable, and the reflective reader must wonder how the characters arrived in these precarious states of mind in which they seek guidance and reassurance from fictitious sources. Lacan states in his discussion of the reality principle that, "consciousness has to come to terms with that outside world, and it has had to come to terms with it ever since men have existed and thought and tried out theories of knowledge" (47). In essence, the characters are trying out theories of knowledge to pursue their own desires, but they do not approach the solution to their fantasies through a conscious and rational thought process.[2] Instead, the characters blindly determine which areas of illusion or fantasy to incorporate into the current situation, as is exemplified by the argument Blaise and Monty have about how much information should be given to each of the women to relieve Blaise's guilty conscience:

> 'I live in my consciousness.' [says Blaise]
>
> 'Why be resigned to that? You imagine even now that you will sort out your life as an emperor sorts out his kingdom and that it all really depends on you. Don't play it so tragically. Life is absurd and mostly comic. Where comedy fails what we have is misery, not tragedy. You don't exist all that much anyway. Your breaths are numbered. Of course you can't solve it all now by a rational act of will. And of course there are deep automatic retributions for any wrong-doing. Because of what you have

[2] In both her philosophy and public lectures Murdoch has stated she is not a Kantian. She does not accept his theory of morality—that a person should act on a maxim that can be applied universally to everyone—instead, she writes novels where the characters have created an individual world which one's own concept of morality develops. Reason and morality exist within the contexts of the fantasy a character inhabits and cannot be applied universally, but instead are applied by the individual possessing the fantasy to another individual who holds a particular role in one's fantasy. See Murdoch's discussion in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* for more on Murdoch's relation to Kant (431-460).

> done things will happen later which can't possibly be foreseen. But don't look on yourself as a tragic hero. Think about right acts, right moves…. You will act when the pain and fear become too much. Perhaps that is now. Better move before you get used to the new pain and the new fear (130).

In this passage Monty counsels Blaise to live outside his consciousness, an entity which tells him he has two sons and two women to whom he must make an account of his actions. Monty urges Blaise not to divulge anything that may lose him everything, and to bury it under the *moment*. It is the instant that Blaise must act within, before his fantasy life engages itself into the situation and creates another uncontrollable and corrupt desire—such as Blaise's desire later in the novel to have both women share his life equally. Yet, as Monty states, Blaise already believes himself to *be* something he is not, an emperor in a tragic situation, and as such his life can be settled in the usual ways that literature has sorted out the troubles of royalty. Monty goes on to declare that in the vast scheme of things, Blaise does not exist to any great extent, and this is due as much to Blaise's reliance on concepts and standards of living outside of his own life (i.e. the emperor fantasy), as it is to Blaise's mortal impermanence in the world in which he is only able to act and accept consequences, not to divine a new reality in which he is able to undo his actions or have limitless chances to achieve his desires.

One fantasy has a chain effect on the characters by producing yet another desire or fantasy, similar to the chain effect Blaise's problems create. Thus, fantasies produce solutions, but only insofar as they create more fantasies. And in many cases, the fantasy a character creates is formed entirely in desire and not created in terms of providing solutions. As such, Blaise's fantasies are ill-suited to resolve his problems, and instead perpetuate a series of crises produced from fantasies that failed to absolve him of the problems created by the last fantasy he attempted to bring to fruition. For

example, Blaise is a therapist and sees himself as an intellectual, thus he reads Freud and French philosophy and lives his life according to the principles and concepts he finds within these texts. These concepts, strict and comfortless as they are, lead him to his wife, Harriet, who has a comforting sense of Christianity that attracted him when they met. However, after a few years he becomes restless with her lack of intellectual ambition and, bored with ideas of God, he seeks satisfaction again in his intellectual roots—and finds a mistress, Emily, at a lecture on Merleau-Ponty. The resulting loss of 'well-being' stimulated from the tension in the relationship with Emily and the secret double life he has with her, creates dissatisfaction and leads him back to Harriet and her vague ideas about Christianity, which also leads to his encouragement of Christian teachings to his son, David. However, the damage he created with his second relationship has already left a permanent impression on his life and he develops a web of lies, in part thanks to his novelist neighbor, Monty, who helped him create a fake patient with severe mental disabilities. This new creation in Blaise's life meant he must spend nights with his 'patient', which in reality he spent with his mistress and second family. Of course what was essentially Blaise's original plot, to find satisfaction and fulfillment through a wife, thickens as he gathers more people into his web of deceits and would-be solutions. If Blaise had not envisioned his satisfaction so thoroughly through one fantasy (i.e. a life with Harriet) he would not have felt such a strong degree of disappointment when that fantasy proved not enough. "There is a level (not necessarily the deepest one) in any marriage where love fails. Emily was a chemical which showed up what had been previously concealed, not making the rest false, but completing the picture" (Murdoch 80). Perhaps if Blaise had not centered his satisfaction on a fantasy of life with Harriet his marriage would have worked, but, instead, other areas of his life would suffer. The fantasies that the characters surround their lives with lead to desires which feed into the 'machine'; as the characters seek happiness and a sense of 'well-

being' their own fantasies lead them to believe they can find it in one thing which leads to another desire or need culminating in yet another unattainable fantasy.

3. The Machine as a Life Force Driven by Fantasy

Murdoch's characters test readers, asking the reader to evaluate life and define a set of rules one is supposed to live by *and* to give evidence that the rules or set of standards are superior. And yet, as Murdoch also obliges us to ask, by what measure of authority or reason are we to judge the superiority of a given standard? The evaluation of a life and an adequate definition of happiness is really the central problem of the entire novel and each character struggles to make progress on these things by referring to their fantasy lives. In some cases the fantasy is encased in sexual desires and in an extremely different case the fantasy may involve some kind of religious example that the character wants their life to imitate. Fantasies are extremely complex organisms in the novel and become characters themselves as the characters give in to the wish to try to fulfill them.[3] Slavoj Žižek explains the role of fantasy in the lives of human beings in perfect 'machine-like' form:

> A fantasy constitutes our desire, provides its coordinates; that is, it literally 'teaches us how to desire'… it provides a 'schema' according to which certain positive objects in reality can function as objects of desire, filling in the empty places opened up by the formal symbolic structure… The

[3] As will be seen throughout this essay, fantasies are the ideas that characters—and ultimately the reader as well—use to compose themselves. Fantasies are like myths by which the characters (and, in thinking reflexively, the readers too) use to escape their problems and to develop fantasies, desires or wishes that are so much a part of everyday life; therefore, fantasy is literally an entity that creates the dimensions of being. This idea is supported by Murdoch in an interview in which she stated: "I think that people create myths about themselves and are then dominated by the myths. They feel trapped, and they elect other people to play roles in their lives, to be gods or destroyers or something, and I think that this mythology is often very deep and very influential and secretive, and a novelist is revealing secrets of this sort." (Bellamy and Murdoch, 138).

> Freudian point regarding fundamental fantasy would be that each subject, female or male, possesses such a 'factor' which regulates her or his desire… There is nothing uplifting about our awareness of this 'factor': such an awareness can never be subjectivized; it is uncanny—even horrifying—since it somehow 'depossesses' the subject, reducing her or him to a puppet-like level 'beyond dignity and freedom' (7-8).

Murdoch's characters become trapped in a machine of fantasy, much as in Žižek's description above. A human being grows up in a world of fantasy and this fact cannot be escaped. Fantasies are created in an individual at a very young age through the simplest of events or ideas, such as the desire for an object or person or through reading children's fairy tales, and, as one grows older, desires only increase leading to a richer and more complex fantasy life. However, as Murdoch's characters also illustrate, fantasy becomes a trap as the characters try to negotiate a path to fulfill their desires, and they ultimately lose their ability to act rationally or consciously in their world because elements of their fantasy life come from the world around them and so it becomes more difficult for them to distinguish between the two. Yet, the characters are able to continue to live in these realms of fantasy because they begin developing fantasies, and using them as solutions to their life's problems, in childhood; essentially one never has a concept of a life without fantasy. However, as will be discussed, a tension develops in the characters because there is an idea in one's mind that there must be a world existing outside of fantasy and that is the world governing the characters' moral foundations.

Murdoch's characters develop their fantasies from various media that consistently reappear in the daily schedule of their lives, such as psychiatry, religion and the influence of friends. Additionally, there are some experiences that are a part of growing up and return to affect people throughout their life, such as attending church as a child or reading school books. It is through the portrayal of these basic human events

that Murdoch presents her query: while things such as art, science, literature, and God are introduced at some point in many people's lives, how deeply is one to involve them in one's own life and to what extent does one allow their presence to influence one's decisions?[4] It is this very decision concerning the depths of certain ideals and practices that grow to form the very essence of one's fantasy life. The greatest example of this query is found in Murdoch's tortured heroine Harriet. She lives in a world where her husband is one of the greatest therapists and her son is destined for greatness and she, the adoring and self-sacrificing wife and mother, is happy so long as her family thrives. Of course her expectations and fantasies are doomed to failure, as her son grows older and finds her maternal attentions less and less necessary, and ultimately her husband must confess his conscience. However, when Blaise is no longer able to contend with the stress of lying to two women and cowardly gives Harriet a letter in which he confesses to having a mistress and another son and begs her forgiveness, Harriet's fantasy life is so strongly held together, that she is unable to deal with what has happened and she does what her husband asks of her. She relies on her past fantasies of being some sort of sainted wife and mother, which allows her to maintain her ideal image of the perfect wife and mother by truly forgiving her husband without a moment of true anger. But, in not recognizing her husband's character and the situation he had created in her life and her son's life, she ultimately signs her divorce papers because, by attaining her forgiveness, Blaise immediately begins to build new fantasies out of still more outrageous desires, such as when he demands Harriet to share him with his

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[4] Sharon Kaehele and Howard German note that Murdoch's novels are often set in complex realities, but her characters are always striving for simplicity. Thus, Murdoch's portrayal of the world is not as Kant imagines, but, because rational men have different natures, every individual has a different view of the world (556). However, the characters in *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* do not exactly appear as rational beings, instead they are solipsistic and driven by their egos. Within the framework of the novel, the characters' differing views of the world are a greater result of their fantasies than their 'natures'. One could in fact claim every human has essentially the same principle of nature—one desires and pursues, yet it is the *individual* fantasy that affects the characters' view of the world to the greatest extent.

mistress. Blaise continues to make demands of Harriet, and the more she gives, the more he needs, until she is finally unable to reconcile his fantasies with her own fantasies of life and she leaves her husband, dying in a truly freak accident at the airport before achieving her freedom.

In examining the events of her life and her thought processes, the reader must wonder how far Harriet should have allowed her Christian commitments towards forgiveness, goodness and unconditional love to affect her reaction to Blaise's long-term adultery and second son? At the conclusion of the novel, one must ask oneself whether Harriet would have lived had she demanded her husband quit his secret life when he was on his knees begging her forgiveness, instead of giving him utter faith and forgiveness and enfolding his mistress and second son, Luca, into her life? Would she have found happiness? Or more importantly, *could* Harriet have ever developed the notion that she had a choice in her reaction? According to Monty, the philosopher and puppet master of the novel, Harriet (like all the characters) is who she is and cannot change

> You are not capable of suddenly "living free". You are not prepared for it by nature or training. You have got to act the humble powerless part. You cannot and ought not to claim the dignity of will and action. In other words, you've got to behave like a saint no matter how peevish you may feel, because you, being you, haven't any viable alternative (271)

Monty claims that Harriet has no free choice, not only in her course of action, but in the person she *must* be. Essentially, all of the characters live their lives according to fantasy because they have been trained to do so from childhood, and as such they live as machines governed by the ideals of their fantasies and not by choices or decisions one

may suddenly feel from one moment.[5] Just as Blaise attains forgiveness from Harriet and it appears his life could suddenly reform and he could become the husband and father he yearned to be when his conscience was tortured by his secrets, he is unable to suddenly become that reformed person because that is not what his fantasies have trained him to be. He is unable to grasp the freedom that Harriet has given him, and instead he recreates a situation similar to that he recently narrowly escaped.

Harriet is the most dramatic example of allowing a fantasy to overrun one's life. She believed unquestioningly that what she believed to be her innate goodness and her unswerving Christian beliefs would give her an almost divine strength and make her the better person, and therefore that her desires would be the 'winner' of the situation and consequently that she, Blaise and David would be a stronger family for their struggle. However, just as Blaise admired and needed Harriet at one point in his life and then needed a mistress, Emily, at another, Blaise needs Harriet's strength and forgiveness when his secret is finally let out, but he finds himself drawn to Emily's fragility in the end.

This is the machine of fantasy in action. Harriet believes she has an overwhelming sense of goodness, morality and religion from her childhood and later adult practices, and she relies on these things to carry her through her life; she relies on a fantasy life that she believes lends her an impregnable sense of being instead of identifying her problems and inventing a solution to fit the situation. She never asks herself or Blaise the one question every reader wants to know (though perhaps on a

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[5] This idea is directly related to the question of where morality develops. Maria Antonaccio discusses Murdoch's characters in terms of creatures that make pictures of themselves, or develop an idea of what they want to be and what they already believe themselves to be, and *then* come to resemble that picture of an individual (Antonaccio, 627). Thus, morality is a term that is relative in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine because there does not appear to be universal reality in which one set of standards for moral living may apply to every individual. Therefore, Blaise may live his life in terms the reader may find to be morally repugnant, but, because of the man he has created for himself out of his fantasies and the people he has chosen to become part of his life, his world functions well—and makes sense in terms of the story. Harriet is just the sort of person who will forgive him because of the fantasies she has allowed to work in her life (those Monty ascribes to her character in the above passage) and he is aware of them because she is the type of person his type was searching for.

more ontological level than Harriet), 'why have you made these choices and why must others suffer for them'? Who have Harriet and Blaise become that has permitted the continuance of an affair which has led them to a completely separate and *other* life? Or, more importantly, who were they before they met and what events made them believe the other person would be a good life partner? Harriet is a static character, to both herself and readers, and thus unable to pose, much less answer, this question. She lives her life according to the fantasy she has engendered for herself, and as such, when the situation deviates too far from the boundaries of her fantasy world, she runs from life and the characters who created the situation, which ultimately leads to her death. However, towards the end of the novel, she begins to believe that she possesses an inner power, an illusion from the fantasies she allows to overrun her life. This inner power is her consistency in believing that everything will turn out right (and so far for her it has) and her belief that, as long as she believes in her husband and remains a forgiving and compassionate wife, he will always return to her. These beliefs have their origins in her Christian ideals and ultimately it is that power, a divine power that is fighting with her, that is exactly what she believes Blaise needs, and he will recognize in her and always return for

> I have just that sort of temperament, she said to herself, the result of a cheerful orderly childhood and a good upbringing and a quiet way of life. Of course, I have never been severely tried, but I have resources and principles. I can rely upon myself and others will be right to rely upon me. This little confidence she placed, without feeling herself in any way remarkable, indeed conscious that she was the smallest of small fry, in the centre of her family. She saw more of Blaise's faults than he ever dreamt of, and supported him with the pure will of her own humble decency. That was how she felt it all and lived it all, and this was a great

> part of her happiness. So it was that when the awful trial did come Harriet swung into response to it with an almost exultant and only momentarily surprised sense of her own strength (264-265)

Harriet feels a certain superiority over Blaise and the other characters because, though she is unable to change who she is and what she desires, the machine within her is one consisting of forgiveness and goodness—at least in her mind. The reader is able to see through Harriet's own fantasies about herself; as is evident in the above passage, Harriet is not at all "humble" about how she views herself, her position in her family or her abilities to control her family. However, Harriet is blind to everything except the image she has created in her mind of her own strength and character and that of her family. She relies on what she believes are her extraordinary abilities (that she has always allowed to rule over her actions) she gains from the fantasy of what she thinks her life is and should be, to such an extent that the 'ideals' (fantasies) she lives by will bury her in the end and set up her mortal destruction

> There she was, where she had always been, in the centre, needed and able to respond. Distress had to be eased, tears dried, and she could do it, and the performance of these duties was patently more important than the indulgence of her jealousy or of her shocked disappointment in her husband. The performance of these duties was a real solace, and the <u>power</u> to perform them filled her up at need like divine grace. This had been before Blaise's second defection. The difference *then* she could never have conceived of beforehand. She could support and forgive a penitent husband who needed her love and her strength. But when all that power seemed no longer necessary [because Blaise chose Emily], when Blaise cut the channel through which, for so many years, as he almost unconsciously made use of it, it had fed him, Harriet felt utterly

> deprived of her central certainties and no longer at all knew how to think about what she ought to do…. For a situation where she was not needed she had no heroism (265)

It is here, when Blaise has rejected Harriet completely, that she loses all sense of self. She cannot comprehend how she failed or why he would have chosen Emily over her because she forgave him and never waivered in her compassion or kindness for him, things he desperately relied on from her. However, it is later when Blaise makes the decision that he should have *both* Harriet and Emily that Harriet awakens and tries to 'fix' circumstances, and takes actions to try to recreate her fantasy. But by the time this happens, Blaise has moved so completely out of the realm Harriet's fantasy life that she cannot find a way to include him any longer in her life. She had a vision of her life with a husband and children that she has done everything in the power of her fantasy life to maintain, but when Blaise demands so much that her own fantasy would disappear under his, there is nothing else she could do other than to create a course of action that excludes Blaise and leave her original fantasy behind in hopes of fulfilling a new version of that fantasy with only Luca and David.[6]

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[6] In many of Murdoch's novels it is possible to see a Freudian influence; however, Murdoch often uses Freud's theories in an ironic or satiric manner. Within *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, Murdoch plays with Freud's psychoanalytic theories in describing the characters' dreams and in portraying David's relationship with his mother and father as somewhat Oedipal (the feelings *Harriet* has for David are actually more defined by Murdoch than David's for his mother and father). However, the greatest use of psychoanalytic theory is found in the overall mechanism of the machine. The characters do not seem to become fully functioning adults, instead they seem to merge with Freud's concept of the infant phase of development. Thus, the characters' concept of the world is that others are an extension of one's self and one's needs and desires are maintained by incorporating others into one's fantasy, but individuals do not see themselves as acting in a larger world that exists outside one's desires. Dorothy Winsor discusses this Freudian conflation of adulthood and childhood and claims that characters are either absorbers or absorbed by others and that is the ultimate moral division in the novel—those absorbing v. those absorbed, thus good is allowing or even *promoting* self-destruction to prevent one's self from destroying others (396-398). But, this idea does prove itself in the context of the novel because *every* character tries to absorb other characters into their own fantasies. Even the charitable and 'virtuous' (as labeled by other characters) Harriet eventually flees the situation when she discovers she cannot fix Blaise or David so that they fulfill the roles she had defined for them in her world. Furthermore, if good means one has to make the decision to destroy one's

Harriet's myths and machine-like press forward are seen and commented upon by Edgar Demarney (another character, like Blaise, who is able to speak and give advice, but cannot see or apply it within his own life), who forewarns her that her actions will not save her:

> Because you are good you think that you can save them, but it is they who will defile you… They will not tolerate your forgiveness, in the end they will hate you for it, they will go on intriguing as they have always done, they will not even be able to help it, and you will find too late that you have not been a healer but an accomplice of evil… you will eternally be his victim…For his sake you must not allow this foul thing to continue (210-211)

In this one speech Edgar explains to Harriet the ideals and concepts, the fantasies, by which she lives and her inability to stop employing the machine which ultimately sets off the machine in and around the other characters as well. The final line is a plea for Harriet to break the cycle, to overcome her past decisions and analyze the situation (i.e. that of her husband's adultery and duplicitous life) and make a decision based on the present, not on illusions she has only read about outside of reality. However, just as Edgar cannot commit to his own advice, neither will any other character in the novel do so (almost all of whom were present to hear Edgar's speech), because they have grown accustomed not only to seeking a solution to their desires within their self-perpetuating fantasy lives, but also to creating desire itself out of these fantasies.

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self, it makes sense that none of the characters embrace this concept. Not even Emily, whose desires are not fully defined by Murdoch, will accept a situation in which Blaise does not fulfill her idea of him. When Blaise becomes enraptured by Harriet's forgiveness and allows her to control the situation, Emily flees and refuses to be a part of the new situation in which her role in the situation and the role of Blaise in her world has changed. She only returns when Blaise agrees to return the situation to something resembling what must ultimately be her fantasy.

The character's desires ultimately lead them to full *fantasy* lives, but never satisfaction for satisfaction's sake. That is, the characters seek happiness and fulfillment, and, in seeing those things in fictitious sources, they make it their mission to emulate those sources in order to find that same happiness and satisfaction in life. But, what ultimately occurs is that one desire is attained only to be replaced by another desire, because there is no editor in life that limits individuals to the creation of only happy-endings and a story that must take place within a particular amount of pages. Desire is a self-sustaining concept which drives the characters to create their fantasy worlds and to live within them

> Within psychoanalysis, this knowledge of drive, which can never be subjectivized, assumes the form of knowledge about the subject's 'fundamental fantasy', the specific formula which regulates his or her access to *jouissance*. That is to say: desire and *jouissance* are inherently antagonistic, even exclusive: desire's *raison d'etre* (or 'utility function', to use Richard Dawkin's term) is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire (Žižek 38-39)

As Žižek states above, desire feeds upon itself and the consumer never breaks free and never achieves its goal/fantasy. Desire is the ultimate machine, or driving force, in each character's life because the fantasies encompass what is desired and how to go about obtaining that object of desire. It is in this respect that each character develops a fantasy of what they wish their life to be. The body or the form that is fantasy develops in childhood and continually regenerates itself throughout life as the individual is exposed to new things and events which create new fantasies. The experiences the characters encounter through people, literature, religion, science, art, psychoanalysis and education become mythologized or idealized in their minds as *their* experiences, and become a part of what they see as their own ability to overcome a situation and thus their own

needs[7], and the fantasies ultimately perpetuate themselves within the cycle of desire Žižek discusses above.

4. It is Ultimately a *Lack* of Mimicry in Reality that Creates the 'Machine'

The characters of The Sacred and Profane Love Machine create and adhere to fantasies endorsed by cultural sources (i.e. literature, the Bible, scientific and philosophical theories, etc.) and ultimately each is using, even if unknowingly, the source of their fantasy to answer the question: what must one do in order to attain happiness? Harriet believes that if she utilizes her Christian background, what she sees as a powerful strength rooted in goodness, her beliefs will allow her and David to prevail over Emily and Luca in Blaise's mind and he will choose her own family over Emily and Emily's son. However, what Harriet believes will happen is driven by her ideals of what her husband should be, not by the actual character of her husband. Blaise's character is affected by many desires, all fighting for supremacy; also, his fantasy life is rooted in many different sources, such as his everyday career as a therapist, his love of literature and philosophy and his childhood memories of Christianity. There are other concepts that work more subtly, but Murdoch engraves Blaise's character with a restless ambition

[7] The confusion of reality and fantasy in characters' minds aids in the creation of a world in which the characters feel comfortable with their actions and their desires. However, this comfort distorts the characters' principles and values because the conflation of fantasies and real situations inhibits their ability to create solutions to problems without involving their wills, and, as such, any solution would only cause another problem because the solutions are established out of desires. John Haldane supports this idea and claims that art has the ability not only to aid but to create one's view of the world "states of mind are either structured purely out of the delivery of the sense, and accordingly have as their end correspondence with the actual condition of the world—truth; or they embody act of the will, wants and longings which seek their realization in some possible states of affairs and whose goal is thus not truth but satisfaction. Given this theory, it follows that a person's search for value, or his judgment that he ought to act in a certain way, cannot originate in discoveries as to how the world is in itself, apart from his or her interests" (8). Thus, we might say, Murdoch's characters live in the machine because they have no other choice. As one encounters objects, beauty, ideas and events, it is inevitable that one is affected by these things and desires to make them a part of one's own life. And, as these desires are pursued, they develop into fantasies which one cannot separate from the real events that happen to them, and, as such, one's fantasies affect choices and values.

he cannot quite name, which makes him rely too strongly on ideas and beliefs he believes he knows because of a long or daily exposure and love of them. However, the characters' unwillingness to look at their lives without the protection and guide of these myths feeds into a machine in which no character is satisfied for long because another need, desire or question arises because no one's life is able to strictly follow the rules of psychiatry, one literary tale, the image of a painting, or the life of an apostle of God or the life of a friend. Therefore, the fantasy one uses to overcome one situation fails in another situation or leads to another problem because life does not strictly mimic any of the above things. Thus, no character truly progresses or attains profound happiness because any answer they may discover is gradually diminished through the developments of new questions or problems that arise from the original situation. The inability to establish an abiding solution to life's critical problems is the inadequacy of the human mind (and supports the machine), which then takes cues from various sources, such as literature, art, science, religion, etc., where the answers seem to have produced agreeable results. It is this temporary solution to life that the mind cannot resist when confronted with an obstacle that creates the 'machine' in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine.[8]

The machine is the force that creates the action of the plot, and since actions define characters in terms of their values, therefore the machine is also the mechanism that creates characters. It drives the characters to commit actions according to their self-perpetuating desires, which have limited the their ability to develop on any level of being. While every character is seeking happiness, each has a unique experience that drives them toward the solution that seems to be universal: love. Though love is not one of

[8] Fantasy is hostile toward anything static. If one believes one has found a definitive 'reality' or 'truth', it disappears. Thus, fantasy is "hyper-self-reflective" in its need to constantly reevaluate one's desires and vision of the world, and therefore fantasy is also a mode of decomposing unities of time, space and character not only in the lives of the characters, but also within the narrative, as will be further discussed in the eighth section about the reader (Olsen 20).

Murdoch's more transparent fantasies, or obvious driving forces of desire, it appears subtly but frequently in many scenes—after all what other force drives men to fail so utterly? As the final lines of the novel conclude, love is man's greatest achievement and yet also the hardest to hold onto, "The heart would be touched again, not dreadfully perhaps, not divinely, but touched. There would be innocent frivolous unimportant happiness once again in the world" (366). Here, Edgar has had his heart crushed, but he refuses to acknowledge the intensity of what has happened to him because he cannot admit to himself who he really is—a homosexual—or what he is really looking for in life—love. He is an academic teaching at a prestigious university, and to him love probably seems like the greatest illusion ever taught to human beings. Yet, Edgar yearns for love from Monty and also seeks another form of love from Harriet, though he has convinced himself it is more of an erotic love than the actual friendship that it really is. For Edgar, and the rest of the characters, love is something that is not easily definable for them, but they have convinced themselves it is the only source of happiness.[9]

However, as Murdoch depicts with the title of the novel and the painting that illustrates the same theme, love is not simple and it does not automatically include or produce happiness. The embodiment of this idea is found in Blaise Gavender, a seemingly normal middle-aged married family man who has become lost in the sacred

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[9] Kaehele and German claim that love originates in emotions, not in the mind, and that it is something found deeper in the mind than the relative accessibility of one's rational intellect (557). Murdoch supports this idea throughout the novel as characters fall in and out of love with one another and form deep attachments to others that make the breaks incredibly painful (that is if a break is possible at all—Blaise, for his part, decides to have both women). The irrational emotional attachment characters form with one another is best portrayed through Edgar, who loves Monty, but refuses to acknowledge such a painful fact about himself. Instead, he falls in love with first Sophie and then Harriet (both are women with whom Monty develops intimate attachments), and believes he feels something of such consequence that it cannot be ignored. However, his aggressive pursuit of these women always intertwines with Monty, and thus, he Edgar does feel an emotional force in his pursuits that allow him to ultimately deny his uncomfortable feelings toward an reciprocating Monty. Ultimately, love is another concept originating in the individual and dependent upon fantasy, because its definition and consequence is different for each character.

and profane love machine and can no longer separate his self from the machine-inspired *ideas* of a contented self. He believes he needs the intense moral strength found in his wife, Harriet, and he comes to appreciate the qualities in her that he lacks, such as strength, compassion and an ethical structure (things that are a result of the machine within *her*), and he uses her to complete his shortcomings in hopes that he will find fulfillment through her.

> Even her vague Christianity, which he had taken care not to uproot but had hoped to see quietly wither, now seemed something he could not do without, any more than he could forego the special way she stretched out her hands to him when he entered a room where she was. There was no doubt she influenced him (23)

He finds fulfillment through his wife's character, which he absorbs as part of his own. However, he still finds faults in her, such as her lack of intellect and ambition, and thus his happiness is threatened because he begins to develop a desire for the things she lacks, and that leads him to seek a greater contentment, a bliss that is only so far imagined and one that originates in books and the fantasies of his patients. Therefore the reader is quickly introduced to Blaise's mistress and the unhappy prolonged life he has created with her. Blaise found that, as with his life with Harriet, his passionate and wholly complete happiness with Emily ha begun to disintegrate under the expectations he imagined their affair to be. He began the affair with Emily because he was bored with his non-stimulating life with Harriet and came across Emily one day and believed he had found a like individual, "he had felt (yet on what evidence?) like an animal who had thought that just *his* sort of animal did not exist anywhere in the forest—and then had suddenly met one" (71). The affair with Emily opened Blaise into a new realm of happiness, "private happiness", which gave him everything he felt he needed: stimulation, sex, danger, sin, and even an intellectual mind to discuss his ideas.

However, the affair became too encumbered, and not just because they had a son, but because Blaise began to seek the purity and innocence he had with his wife in the beginning. While trying to adjust to the misery that has become his second, secret relationship, Blaise implores Emily not to push them into behaving as machines and she replies, "'We used to be two happy machines stimulating each other'" (89). The stimulation Emily speaks of evolves not from the fulfillment of a fantasy, but from the new desires that arise out of the new situation. Simply by using the word "stimulating" Emily betrays the happiness she believes she and Blaise once had; they had to continue *trying* to make themselves happy by using the other, and this system would only work as long as Blaise never slipped and began desiring his wife again and so long as Emily never lapsed into desiring someone else.

The revolving cycle of desire seemed to preclude situations riddled with problems, and this leaves Blaise, and the reader, questioning whether happiness actually exists in any permanent form, or whether it is a transient thing that we *expect* to exist because of fantasy? While Blaise looks for his happiness in the women he spends his life with, the reader begins to realize the question Blaise cannot see because it is layered beneath the original question: is happiness real, and, if so, is it always all or nothing? And perhaps the next question should concern the root of happiness: does happiness announce the presence of love? While Murdoch philosophizes over this idea throughout the novel, she does not dramatically announce this idea because this novel is not a love story or a romance. Instead Murdoch is developing an idea about life, one she ponders over even as she presents it for her readers' consideration. Therefore, while examining and drawing conclusions about Blaise's life, the reader begins to see the

deeper issue in the novel: an image of happiness is always attainable briefly, *profanely*, but an original, destined and *sacred* love is still in question.[10]

The reader may easily draw the conclusion that, because of Harriet's religiosity and her selfless demeanor, she is what Murdoch meant by the idea of a "sacred love" in the title, and that, as the young and selfish mistress, Emily is the woman to be sacrificed, the "profane love". However, as Murdoch illustrates throughout her novel, art and literature are deceptive designs. What creates the idea that love brings happiness or that one kind of happiness or love is greater and more lasting than another? A perpetuating myth arrived at through the fairy tales of childhood, art depicting great beauty and joy, and the countless other lies cunningly crafted from everyday experiences: "Blaise closed the book. Of course both Harriet and David knew the story [Dostoevsky's The Idiot] though Harriet usually claimed to have forgotten… They had read most of Scott, Jane Austen, Trollope, Dickens" (24). Blaise closes the book he reads aloud as a nightly ritual he and his family have enjoyed since their son was young, and perhaps one they enjoyed with their parents; however, the ideas these books implant do not fade and instead produce longings for the same dramatic happiness, greatness and passion the characters of these books possess. Concerning Blaise's other family, it becomes clear that he chose Emily because of her ability to add a drama and passion to his life that mimics the greatness of the monumental tales of classic literature. For example when Blaise is still yearning to confess his sins and regain a

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[10] Velleman states that love disarms one's emotional defenses and makes one vulnerable to others. Love becomes an exercise of reflecting on the world and those who inhabit it. When one blocks others ability to emotionally connect with him/her, one is not really 'seeing' the world; however, when falls in love and those emotional constraints are lifted, one is actually able to glimpse who the other person is (361). However, in Murdoch's novel no character comes close to seeing or understanding the true person beneath the role that was assigned to him or her within a fantasy. True, some of the characters try to understand what another character is thinking and needing (for example, Blaise and Emily), and perhaps that is the extent to which Murdoch allows one to love another. It is unlikely the characters would be able to step outside their vision of reality or their vision of the roles assigned to other characters to keep one's fantasy world together, but it says something about one's character that one would at least try to step outside one's fantastic preconceptions of the world and others.

pure relationship with his wife, but must maintain a relationship with Emily who knows his devotion is waning, Emily cries out in a more dramatic reflection of a Greek myth about Orpheus and Eurydice: “You’ve killed me and sent me to hell, and you must descend to the underworld to find me and make me live again. If you don’t come for me, I’ll become a demon and drag you down into the dark (96)”. This myth is particularly appropriate not only as a metaphor for Blaise and Emily’s relationship, but as a metaphor for the story as a whole. Orpheus was said to be the son of the Muses and irresistible because of his musical abilities, and when he finally found and attained love she was taken from him unexpectedly. But, that was not the end of their story; Orpheus risks everything to get her back from the underworld and is given a second chance, but he loses her because of his impatience to see her again when he looks back before she has fully entered the human realm again. What better metaphor for Blaise than a mortal born from inspiration, irresistible to all and given chance after chance, but, ultimately, what he most desires eludes him—and eludes him precisely *because* of his desire for it. However, what Emily cries out seems to be a demand that he come for her a second time—if the myth continued and Orpheus was allowed entrance to the underworld a second time. She is demanding that Blaise acknowledge her and fight for their relationship, their life together, or else…? In context the “drag you down” would mean that Emily would tell Harriet about their relationship and make Blaise as miserable as she is; however, looking at the story with everything one knows about the characters’ fantasy lives and their inability to be happy with their circumstances, this moment is actually a plea for permanence and it is the only one made in the entire novel. Though it may seem as if Harriet is fighting for the permanence of her family, she makes it clear that she thrives on her family’s inability to stay out of trouble because she feels powerful when they need her and rely on her for her forgiving and compassionate nature.

Thus, while the characters follow their own conclusions brought on by the operating fantasies in their own lives, they create terrible realities for their lives because the need to fulfill desires and find happiness is the foundational drive of the machine. In trying to make their lives a replica of what they have seen work in the origins of their fantasies—literature, science, religion, etc., it is their *reality*, their existence outside of the sources of their fantasies, that excludes them from such satisfaction. The essence of reality for Murdoch's characters is not only the satisfaction of desires, but the relations they have with other characters. The interaction that takes place between the characters feeds the machine of desire and complicates situations by placing one character's fantasy life in the middle of another character's life. Thus, as Emily states, the characters' machines are constantly stimulating another character's machine—happily or unhappily.

5. The Unavoidable Nature of the Machine

If the machine breeds unhappiness and drives its host to envision impossible lives for themselves that ultimately eat away at the very essence of reality, one wonders how the machine is created and how to avoid such a creation in oneself. The truth seems to be that reality is ultimately a version of fantasy; it is created through the unconscious mechanisms of the machine that begin to create an impact on a person in childhood and the machine of fantasy only grows in strength as the child grows into an adult. Thus, David is the perfect character to examine how the machine is an unconscious creation in everyone and engenders different 'realities' for each character because he is in the process of forming the foundations of his machine. But, because the machine is fueled by fantasies, the characters believe their reality is *the* reality as they interact with others. Yet in their unhappiness and inability to fulfill their desires, the machine actually creates a world of contrary realities for characters whose fantasies and

desires involve interaction with others, who are involved with their own fantasies and thus their own realities and do not acknowledge the presence of other characters' fantastic realities.

Murdoch's story implores the readers to disassemble the world of the novel and find the individual worlds or realities which each character inhabits, and only then form judgments about their actions and lives. However, there are some characters, such as David, who seem to have been created to help the reader make sense of each character's personal reality. For example, David is a rather low profile character who does not appear frequently, but, when he does, he seems to put the chaotic situations and ideas within the plot into perspective, as when he remarks that "their self-conscious air of a happy home life made him want to go and starve in a garret" (25). David, the product of Blaise and Harriet's love, sits in confined judgment of his parents as his father reads from a book and his mother darns his father's shirt. He understands that his parents have developed an image of an idyllic family, and that they believe they have achieved this image, and that they have developed little performances to maintain this image. However, David is growing into his own fantasy life and judges his parents not only by their own actions and selfish ideals of family which are forced on him. Indeed, he has developed enough of a fantasy life of his own to judge his parents for not meeting his own expectations and his own familial image, as is characterized by his typical teenage outcry, "they [Harriet and Blaise] just do not know how *complicated* I am" (199). David is perhaps the most sympathetic character in the novel because he is so clearly drawn as a moody and displaced teenager whose motives and actions most readers will understand. He is just discovering life and his own dreams and desires, thus they are not as complex and distorted as the rest of the characters' fantasy lives, and, as the story progresses, one is able to see the influences his parents have had on his life. He is the only character whose responses to the actions of the other characters seem

justifiable and understandable to the reader who is often immersed in the thoughts and ideals of machine-driven adults. When he finds out his father has been having an affair and has another son, he is angry and hates his father. When his mother informs him, after his father has chosen Emily, that she is fleeing to Germany and is planning to take not only himself but Luca as well, he hides and stays behind out of anger and resentment of Luca. He reacts to situations with easily identifiable emotions that the reader relates to without difficulty, in contrast to the emotional forces and actions of the adults.

However, Murdoch is trying to convey an idea with this story that discusses and analyzes the degree by which real people structure their lives based on fiction and other driving ideals or forces through the use of fantasies. The profound twist of this idea is that, as the reader reads the book itself, the reader has involved him- or herself in the very process Murdoch is describing for her characters. The reader is holding something that has produced effects in the characters—a tool of the machine—and this fact should make the reader uncomfortable. The real and the fictional become merged into one world, which the characters have allowed themselves to slip seamlessly into and adopt as their own world. But, this world inhabited by the human subject (and, paradigmatically, by Murdoch's charcters) is not real, and when one acknowledges the role in which desires play a part in life, a question arises as to the existence of a true Reality. Žižek offers a clue as to the existence of such a Reality that exists apart from fantasy:

> Kant was the first to detect this crack in the ontological edifice of reality: if (what we experience as) 'objective reality' is not simply 'out there', waiting to be perceived by the subject, but an artificial composite constituted through the subject's active participation—that is, through the act of transcendental synthesis—then the question crops up sooner or later:

> what is the status of the uncanny X which *precedes* transcendentally constituted reality? … It was Schelling, of course, who gave the most detailed account of this notion of X… the obscure pre-ontological domain of 'drives', the pre-logical Real which remains forever the elusive Ground of Reason which can never be grasped 'as such', merely glimpsed in the very gesture of its withdrawal (208)

Here, Žižek differentiates between objective reality, on the one hand, and, on the other, one which the subject has had a hand in creating. For Žižek, the Real, beyond fantasy, can never be reached, but instead only inferred as part of the withdrawal or loss of that Real into the fantasy. Reality exists only inasmuch as we depart from it. In the novel, each character creates their own 'world', one in which their actions and decisions are logical and right, but each world is based on their own drives and desires that manifest themselves ultimately in the fantasy the Real is subjected to.

Each character has perpetuating desires that create a machine which ultimately leads to the creation of their own world, but David's machine is still developing and this is important for the reader because it demonstrates Murdoch's idea of how the machine forms. The reader can identify marks in David's personality from his father's passion for psychiatry, Freud, literature and academia, as well as from his mother's fondness for Christ, thereby the reader takes notice of the development of the machine. However, David does not adopt these ideas in the same manner as his parents. Rather, they have become definite characteristics in his 'world', portraying the man he will become and the machine that will rule him, as seen in the following passage:

> An early reading of the *The Hound of the Baskervilles* had made David afraid of dogs… Last night he had dreamt… He had so often told his dreams to his father when he was a small child, it was as if his father still roamed inquisitively in his dream world, a co-spectator rather than a

> denizen… Prayer had been an addiction once, but the perpetual presence of this ubiquitous intrusive Friend amounted now almost to hallucination. Why had such a weird belief been induced in him when he was too young to defend himself against it? And how had his mother's vague gentle faith and the mild Anglicanism of his public school spawned in him the secret superstitions of a mopping mowing slave? Compulsive stupid rituals had replaced those frenzied conversations with God (8-9)

Childhood literature, the remnants of his mother's Christian practices, his school's faith, and his father's psychiatry and penchant for asking questions still confuse and mold David, even if they work as desires in David's life in the opposite direction they work in his parents' and mentors' lives. It is here, in the first pages of the novel, that one is introduced to Murdoch's twisted world of fantasy and reality—one into which the reader is almost immediately integrated. The reader can relate to reading a scary book, talking with parents as a child about dreams at bedtimes, and learning prayers from their parents. However, it is more difficult to see how these things create the David the reader learns about and it is the same for David's parents, because these events or ideals are thought of as 'normal' and not typically thought of as life-altering occurrences. Yet, as is seen in the adults of the novel, these 'normal' events and ideals develop in the character's unconscious will ultimately and affect behaviors.[11]

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[11] Bran Nicol defines masochism not as opening oneself to the will of another, but of willing the other individual into being (155). If one analyzes the characters in view of this definition, it would seem as if every character is *willing* others into a specific being that is able to inhabit a role in one's fantasy. Throughout the novel, it is obvious the characters are enacting some masochistic behaviors, such as the forceful depiction of others through one's particular fantasy, and some of the characters, especially the men, tend to 'rule' over others, emotionally punish, and exploit other characters sexually. For example, Blaise and Monty use the attachment others feel for them to pursue their own desires, even at the cost of hurting those who love them. Furthermore, David is growing into a similar creature, as is evident from the beginning of the novel, with his disregard and disrespect for both of his parents. By the end of the novel, he has his first sexual experience with Pinn. In this encounter she that declares she is no one, that she will even send him from her and ultimately that he will never understand her. However, she quickly becomes defenseless and asks him if he would be able to care for her just a little, and just for a moment,

Harriet and Blaise are David's parents and they often fail to understand their son because they assume that, because he has learned about life through them,he must be just like them. Thus they feel that, if their portrait of a happy family is pleasing to them, then it must be pleasing to David also. But of course, David is not "just like" his parents because his 'world' differs from their reality or world of fantasy. Hegel describes this forceful self-deception and the need to universalize one's life and feelings in The Phenomenology of the Mind. In writing of the creation of one's individuality, he remarks that:

> Their [the possessors of 'individuality'] haste to render assistance [to others around them] was itself nothing else than their desire to see and manifest their own action and not the objectified intent, i.e. they wanted to deceive the other individual just in the way they complain of having been deceived. Since there has now been brought to light that its own action and effort, the play of its powers, is taken for the real intent, consciousness seems to be occupied in its own way on its own account and not on that of others, and only to be troubled about action *qua* its own action, and not about action *qua* an action of others, and hence seems to let others in their turn keep to their own "fact". But they go wrong again; that consciousness has already left the point where they thought it was… Hence it interferes in the action and work of others; and if consciousness can no longer take their work out of their hands, it is at least interested in the matter, and shows this by its concern to pass judgment. (237-238)

Hegel's discussion of consciousness is directly related to the effect of the machine on the characters. David's parents believe they are helping him to grow into a mature and

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without thinking about her vulnerability or the situation, David uses her for his purposes (320-321). Masochism is evident throughout the novel, in both sexual and non-sexual forms, and it certainly pervades the machine of fantasy.

responsible man by instilling within him Christian, philosophical and psychoanalytic ideals and educating him in the classic works of literature and science. However, the real intent behind this process is to make David more like themselves. Harriet and Blaise's consciences are driven by their internal desires, not by the concerns for others around them or even by the consequences of their own actions. Each character's conscience is consumed with its own desires and thus the actions or events that must take place to fulfill those desires. Yet, as is seen with the process of parenting, Harriet and Blaise do interact and try to share their worlds with their son, but the interaction occurs because their worlds are driven by personal internal desires. Harriet and Blaise's consciousnesses only look at David and make judgments about how similar he is to fitting into their world/fantasy and how much he has deviated from it and, in the end, it is that measure by which they connect with one another. This is apparent in the novel when Harriet agonizes over David growing up and changing to the extent that she no longer recognizes him as her son:

> I must pull out, she thought: it was like the ending of an affair, giving somebody up. Would one be thus condemned to break the links one by one? Of course it was simply natural change and not an ending… The trouble was that she could not see at present how her love for David could change sufficiently for her not now and henceforth for ever to be in the position of concealing something which he would uneasily suspect (17)

In this passage, Harriet recognizes a change in her link with her son. Not only are Harriet's feelings for David evolving into something else, but they are evolving into something that has never really existed in her mind before. David is becoming a man with his own ideas and, therefore, he no longer fits the schema Harriet has created in her mind for her son. Thus she is struggling to place him in some other position in her

fantasy. However, in Harriet's fantasy of her life she has a loving and devoted husband and a young and loving little boy, and no matter how hard she tries, David gets left behind in her world because there is no place for him. Instead he is replaced by the younger and more malleable Luca.

Harriet and Blaise, unknowingly or knowingly, have imposed their fantasies of life on their son while trying to inaugurate him into their world, but it is David's decisions and personal experiences that enable him to rise above his parents' machines or to succumb to them. However, the machine's existence does not rely solely on the individual's conscious choice to seek fulfillment through illusions and the experiences of others. As Hegel describes, it is action for action's sake, in conjunction with conscious and unconscious desires and actions, that propel the machine which can be insinuated by anyone and anything (i.e. David's parents, teachers, friends, Greek school books, etc.). Ultimately, the presence of the machine in the character's lives is unavoidable *because* life is full of the interaction of these machines.

6. Looking for a Solution to the Machine in Death

There are unavoidable consequences to the interaction between characters' machines and, when one character's fantasy dominates another character's, the destruction of one individual, or, at the very least, of his or her fantasy, is inevitable as the dominant fantasy survives. Thus, death is actually an aid to the characters in structuring and adjusting their realities. When the events have led the characters to an impasse in which no logical solution seems plausible for the situation, death is usually the trick writers use to return order to the world of the novel. In The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, two characters die and their deaths allow the machines of those who loved them to reset themselves and to continue as usual. Death does not make an impact in the characters' lives—there is no oath of 'I'll be a better man' from either Blaise

or Monty, and ultimately death allows the characters to sink back into their worlds of fantasies and re-cloak their identities after they had become severely stressed and tried (usually by the character who dies).

Almost every character in the book believes him- or herself to be clothed in secrecy and false impressions, because no other character seems to really understand their actions and ideals. Because of the characters inability to make contact with themselves, much less for others to understand who he or she is, a feeling of impotence is created in them. Monty and Sophie's marriage is the enactment of characters' machine-inspired response to such a feeling of impotence. Monty seems to be behind the scenes pulling the strings for each event in the Gavender drama. Monty creates the identity of Blaise's alter-ego, Magnus Bowles, and knows about Blaise's affair almost from the beginning, and later, when the affair is made public, Monty counsels Blaise as to how to correct and avoid some of the catastrophe. Monty also seems to waver on whether or not he is attracted to Harriet and whether he should pursue her. He also takes on the role of surrogate father to David, who admires Monty's writing and intellect and is tutored by him in Greek. Monty even begins to become integrated into Blaise's second family when Emily and her roommate, Pinn, seem obsessed with meeting and forming a relationship with him. From the very beginning of the novel, Monty lives next to the situation and hears and plays a part in everything. Nevertheless, the one thing Monty seems determined to achieve is the same as every other character: happiness. Yet not only does he write illusion, but his own life is one as well. He and Sophie appeared to have a passionate and fairy-tale marriage, yet she cursed him for strangling the life out of her until, finally, he literally did so. There is little doubt that he loved his wife, but their life together seemed turbulent and riddled with jealousy and unhappiness because neither character really knew the person they were married to and neither knew what they wanted out of life. "She [Sophie] admired Monty and she trusted him

absolutely and she was impressed by the way he loved her. She proposed to rest upon him… He had never been able, as most husbands are, to make the transition from frenzy to deep quiet communion" (36). In the end, the only solution was a total annihilation from one another and it seemed fortunate that Sophie developed a fatal disease to push their relationship to an end. Their marriage parallels the relationships Blaise has with Harriet and Emily: one partner wanted to rest on the other, believing it was the right person and the right time to settle into a life with someone, but the other partner loved the other almost too much. But, this kind of relationship is always surrounded by a threat that eventually leads to unhappiness as the characters in the relationship try to navigate their insecurities and differences. This is played out with the fighting, accusations and death in Monty and Sophie's marriage, and formulated in one of the climactic conclusions of the novel:

> Extreme continuing unhappiness often consoles itself with images of death which may in a sense be idle, but which can play a vital part in consolation and also in the continuance of illusion. If *that* happens I am dead, [death] consoles, and also dulls the edge of speculation and even conscience. (217)

In death, the machine is finally destroyed—for the person who dies. However, for the person who lives death is only a comforting illusion that one's life will change and become easier, happier and less tortured, by the absence of the other person. Yet, as is obvious in Monty's character throughout the novel (Sophie died before the opening of the story), death only destroys the living narrative between the deceased and those left behind. It is the completion of one's idea of life lived with another person. But, those fantasies Monty developed of his life without Sophie are just as likely of happening as those he developed of his life with Sophie. Monty is unable to change who he is, what

he does with his life or what he fantasizes about becoming.[12] With Sophie he dreamed of becoming a great novelist and escaping his formulaic novels written about his alter-ego, Milo Fane, and instead writing something great and masterful. After Sophie's death, he again desired to write a great novel and he believed that, without his scheming and torturous wife, he could finally find the inspiration to do so. However, Milo Fane had become a part of him, or rather he had written himself as part of Milo Fane. Monty could not escape the life he had already created for himself for something new and greater than he could have imagined for himself years ago when he was creating his 'reality'. Instead, he returns to writing his unachievable fantasies into his Milo Fane bestsellers:

> As a young man Monty had rather crudely mimed the 'demonism' which it pleased him to feel within him. Later he began, when it was almost too late, perhaps altogether too late, to feel himself to be an intellectual. If only, he thought, he had become a scholar, a collector, a scrutinizer, one whose life *progressed*… Monty felt the need to transform himself, to discipline himself, but Milo drained him of energy and made him sometimes feel that if he abjured this mean exercise of power he would have not power at all. The serious novels which he occasionally attempted did not engage his feelings and soon collapsed, and he would then decide that he might as well give himself a quick rest by writing another Milo. (37)

Monty can never escape the person he is and become the brilliant novelist he envisions because that vision was not a desire when he was creating his fantasies and turning

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[12] In Murdoch's novels recognition of individuality is a necessary part of life. When characters do not admit they are acting from individual desires, others suffer, and when society does not allow for individual needs and world-views, the moral code suffers. When society does not recognize that it is part of the creation of individuals (i.e. myths, literature, science, systems of initiating culture, etc.), a destructive force is created against the very individuals it inspires (Kaehele and German 554-560).

them into realities. Therefore, no matter whom he marries or what events take place to clear up certain disasters in his life (i.e. his marriage), Monty is simply incapable of becoming anything else—just as he tells Harriet that she is incapable of being anyone else and must accept circumstances.[13]

As Sophie found in her extreme physical and mental agony, death can be comforting because it is always the final solution for the person it claims. Death can be the ultimate symbol of peace because it is the end of life's turbulent struggle, and in this novel it is the end of a character's struggle not only to exist but also to create that existence. When the quest for happiness leads to destructive and guilt-ridden paths until finally the conscience is numb to the very idea of innocence and purity, and the original principles sought after are not even a memory, it seems as if death may bring the only true happiness as well because it is the end of the machine. Yet, death has naturally violent and irrevocable connotations that the human conscience does not yearn for and, as illustrated with Blaise's character, permanence is not a trademark of desire, and so death becomes an illusion of comfort built out of religious ideals. In the novel, death symbolizes a release from the hardships of the consequences the characters' actions have laid on one another, but it also instills a fantasy that one has the ability to go on with one's life in whatever fashion one desires and it also allows one to re-characterize the dead and make of them what one wished they had been:

> 'Sophie is dead and you must *respect* her death, and that means not tearing away at the memory of her personality. Death changes our

[13] Lawrence Blum discusses Murdoch's characters inability to change whom they are, even when they are unhappy. The characters seem incapable of making decisions that seem to be more ethical because they are unable to *perceive* the events as they are really happening in the world. Blum states that the distortion of perception is a result of an "obstacle" in the character's life. However, Blum believes an obstacle is a sensitivity to certain unjustices, pain, or discomfort with the subject where the obstacle occurs (715-717), but the obstacles that present themselves when a character is involved in a moral dilemma are actually the result of fantasies. The characters' realities are manufactured from their desires, and, as such, they are unable to become anything outside of their egos which drive the creation of desires.

> relation to people. Of course the relation itself lives on and goes on changing. But you must at least try to make it a good relation and not a rotten one. Sophie is dead and you are alive and your duty is the same as any man's, to make yourself better.' (296)

Death allows the living to re-imagine the dead in such a way as to ease one's conscience by believing the dead would have wanted the living to live just as one fantasizes life should be lived. Thus, Monty's conscience is clear after killing Sophie and Blaise believes Harriet would have wanted him to marry Emily without grieving for her and be thankful her trust fund would go towards making a happy life for himself, Emily, and their family.

There are two characters in the novel who die: Sophie and Harriet, and their deaths seem to leave peace and calm in the characters involved in their life. Harriet dies in a terrorist attack while escaping with Luca, seemingly on the verge of the well-being and happiness she believed she would have again as a mother of a young boy away from Blaise and Emily. However, her death allows Blaise and Emily to develop a real relationship, without Blaise sharing his time between the two women, and, because of the manner of Harriet's death, both Luca and David live elsewhere and Blaise inherits her money, allowing him and Emily to marry and live alone together. In effect, with Harriet's death, all of Blaise and Emily's responsibilities disintegrate. Though Blaise would not have wished Harriet dead, he does acknowledge the blessing her death has given him and, because she left without telling him, he is able to absolve himself of any responsibility for her death he may otherwise have felt:

> Secretly, cautiously, he felt that he had come through the fire and had probably emerged unscathed. He had *survived*. That Harriet should simply have been killed, meaninglessly slaughtered by people who knew nothing of *his* predicament, that his problem could have been so

> absolutely solved in this extraordinary way, struck Blaise first as being unendurably accidental, and later as being fated. It had all happened so quickly that for a time he could not believe that Harriet had gone, that she had been thoroughly and for ever mopped up and tidied away. How terribly complete death was, how strangely clean. (337)

While death seems to have delivered Blaise from the chaos his life had dissolved into, actually, Blaise's machine of fantasy creates the same life that he had with Harriet—except now Emily is the wife who believes in the security of her marriage. It is easy to see Blaise slipping into another affair within the year, and repeating the same mistakes he made with Harriet, because he does not believe he did anything wrong and ultimately the whole situation was resolved to his benefit. As stated above, death is only a solution for Harriet and the relationship she existed in with others, but it is not the final resolution for Blaise, because he will inevitably follow his desires and return himself to his former predicament.

Monty's situation is different in that his problems lay simply within himself and his relationship, and so, when Sophie dies, he believes he is finally able to rest and pursue a part of himself that he felt he could not while his wife was alive. Sophie tormented him when she was well with her need for people, fame and lovers, and, when she was ill, she tormented him for being the one who would live on. Once she was dead, Monty could grieve comfortably for his lost love and think of her only as the woman he had perceived her to be when he fell in love—though these thoughts torment him as well because he had a vision of how his marriage would be and it failed terribly. This is a failure he cannot grasp as he is still comparing life to literature. But, in essence Sophie's death freed Monty, though he would never have *wished* her death. When she begged for it as mercilessly as she did, he gave it to her: "'I wouldn't, I couldn't treat her like a dying person – I had to fight her – and I kept wanting to know and wanting to know – and so

we tormented each other – all that time – until I killed her… I chose the moment of her death, I chose the moment when she should go'" (297-298).

Death plays the part of the comforter and the renewer in the worlds of fantasy. It gives the characters the chance to wipe their lives completely clean and make a decision about their future without hindrance. Blaise could have chosen not to marry Emily and instead to pursue his desire to go to medical school. He could have accepted his release from the plague of a dual relationship and given Emily her freedom by giving her a portion of his new wealth that she could use to raise Luca. Instead, he blindly accepts his freedom from one woman and entraps himself with the other. Thus, he is freed from the constraints of one fantasy that became destructive and entraps himself in another fantasy. Monty could have taken his freedom from the torments of his marriage and finally written the novel he has always wanted. Instead, he stays bound within his house and his memories pondering why his life did not work out the way he planned it, and he eventually goes back to writing the fiction he hates and allowing the machine to work within him once again, "Maybe there are times when one should welcome defeat" (359). Blaise's machine requires that he find a sense of self, a complete self, in a partner and so he chooses to acquire another wife. Monty has developed a life of remorse, always regretting that he never took the time or opportunity to write the great novel he believed was within him, but feared was not, and instead continues a career writing formulaic novels. He uses the death of his wife to add to his remorse and punish himself for her murder by not endeavoring to write his dream novel—dreams being the only world in which such a novel may exist for him.

Therefore, not even death stops the machine, instead it grants a reprieve from the movement of life for a moment and then forces individuals back into the cycle of dreams, fantasies and desires which lead to a cycle of questions, problems and 'solutions'. There is a loss of identity in the machine, and a loss of time—the future is

possessed by the ability to satisfy one's desires (a hopeless endeavor) and the past is filled with mistakes the characters are reluctant to look back on and unable to learn from if they were to look back, and thus the present is a constant deception of self and possibility.

7. Integrating the Reader into the Development of the Machine

Though Murdoch is creating a story in which the characters are consumed with their selfish desires and living in fantastic realities, she must also create a story that readers are able to immerse themselves into with minimal effort. Therefore, she has employed a device through which the reader is able to develop a relationship with the outrageous characters and their dramatic existences—she has recreated a version of herself in the narrative voice.[14] Her narrative voice bridges the gap between story and reader. The narrator interjects phrases, ideas, and philosophical events that mimic those ideas that may be developing in reader's minds about the events of the story and characters. This strategy continually keeps readers in a state of uncertainty about the conclusion of the character's lives, as well as with their own opinions about the characters and the plot. But, Murdoch is building much more than just a connection with the characters. She is insinuating a connection between the reader and her own philosophical quandaries. Murdoch creates this connection through her own philosophizing voice imposed within the omniscient third person narrator. These

[14] While it has been Murdoch's intention (expressed in her philosophical text *The Sovereignty of Good*, cited in Nicol) to separate her personal view of the world from her protagonists and narrators', thereby eliminating her own egocentric view of herself as the writer and narrator, she does not fully succeed in this endeavor. As Nicol claims, "Murdoch's portrait of the author, constantly subject to masochistic impulses, is equivalent of the ego in Freud's structure, while the ethical ideal of impersonality, a safeguard against this process, figures as a version of the superego. Her two characteristic writing 'selves', novelist and philosopher, function in her work like the ego and the superego in the psyche" (152). Thus, Murdoch's narrative world has not been purely created from her imagination. She incorporates her personal ideas into her novels through a complex balancing act that tries to eliminate any judgmental voices in the novel that may develop from her own ego, and, in this process, she is also able to enlighten a broader audience with her philosophical ideals.

moments are clearly instructional for the reader and interjected throughout many moments of characterization. Finally, it is almost as if Murdoch herself becomes an invisible character in the novel, guiding the reader into a particular direction of thought with her philosophy and subtle judgments about the situations and characters themselves.

While in many novels the protagonist is the character with whom many readers become most involved, in Murdoch's novel it is difficult to associate oneself with any one character and, because of their actions and thought processes, it is difficult to *want* to involve oneself with the story, and thus the characters. The story revolves around selfish ego-driven characters that will do or believe whatever it takes to achieve their desires, and much of the time those desires are satisfied to such an extent that the characters feel guilty about their actions and pursue another desire (the machine). This process is repeated to such a degree of dramatization that readers will not want to identify with the characters and their problems because these characters appear to be horrible individuals with no self-awareness and, ultimately, no compassion for others. Thus, the reader's fantasy life may not be attracted to the story. However, the ideal reader will move beyond a first impression of the characters and ask why Murdoch has chosen to depict such flawed and unpleasant characters and what exactly about the characters is so objectionable from the reader's point of view? The narrative world of the story, while not as complicated and remote from the reader's world as a science-fiction or fantasy novel, does present an obstacle to the reader. As discussed above, the narrative world is composed of the realities each character lives within, and as such it is difficult for any relationship to develop between the reader and the story because every part of the story is embedded within the characters' idiosyncratic machines of fantasy. But, because of the character's fantasies, the reader does connect with various characters at different times. For example, a reader with an extensive religious

background may understand Harriet's actions and beliefs, or a teenager or person with divorced parents may understand David's fantasies and actions. But, it is Murdoch's narrative voice that becomes a stable voice of reason and intellect the reader agrees to follow into the depths of the novel, and the narrator makes it possible to understand the characters and their actions.

On the surface, it may seem risky for a novel's audience to feel disassociated from characters and only connect with them on particular levels and only in certain situations, but the narrator's strategy is to present the novel as more about the questions that arise from the story than about the plot. For example, in one of the narrator's typical subtle interjections into the novel, Blaise is trying to justify choosing to keep Emily a part of his life and yet, in an uncharacteristic moment, Blaise is actually thinking about his motives, albeit skewed through fantasy:

> Anything I do is going to be somehow wrong. This solution [to choose Emily over his legitimate family] is objectively the least wrong, and hang my motives. Anyhow, without *those* motives how could I make Emily so happy? And to make someone *so* happy is surely a good thing. What am I supposed to do? What *can* I do for the best? Blaise inquired of some enigmatic power which still seemed, after all this, to be discontented with him and still to accuse him of something. Of what? Of a sort of awful *vulgarity*? Was that his sin, that too its punishment, that he was irredeemably *vulgar*? (242-243)

While the first part of the quote is definitely Blaise trying to justify his choices and actions, the "enigmatic power" that he inquires of seems to be asking the final questions because they are not characteristic of his ideals and thoughts. Is Blaise irredeemably vulgar? Is that his sin—his only sin—and thus also his punishment? The power that Blaise ponders over is the narrative voice that puts everything into perspective for the

reader. Though it may seem as though the writer is developing in Blaise some perspective as well, the knowledge is purely for the reader because Blaise does nothing with this line of thought later in the novel.[15] Blaise does not suddenly become a better person, questioning his actions and motives. Instead, this moment serves to satisfy readers who may feel alienated by Blaise's unconscionable actions and rationalizations. Though the questions seem to come from Blaise's conscience at first glance, the utter lack of confrontation between the ideas and Blaise's behavior prove that these moments are purely for Murdoch to build some kind of relationship with the reader. Because many of the characters' actions and thoughts may be adversative to the reader, the author interjects her narrative voice to provide a connection between the story and the reader to enhance the experience of encountering such characters who appear to be without moral consciences.

As stated above, David is particularly useful to Murdoch in portraying the creation of the machine developing into individual characters' realities because he is still in the process of being affected by others and is not yet fully formed. But, David is also useful in examining what is happening to the reader as he or she enters the world of Murdoch's novel or any other novel because, just as the characters in the novel are affected by books, the reader is holding a book and delving into its world even as the book itself describes this process as hazardous to one's existing definition of reality. Murdoch's book is a novel that philosophizes over the choices individuals encounter in their lives and how, once made, those choices ultimately evolve into a perpetuating machine of fantasy that overwhelms reality. Furthermore, the choices one encounters are created

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[15] The characters are unable to experience true moral change because, as Ben Obumsela states, "virtue seems to require our leaping out of our normally predatory egos… the appearance of success is either a delusion or a sickness of the will" (304). Thus, Murdoch's characters may briefly step outside of their fantastic realities and ask themselves if their actions are moral or will really produce happiness, but the characters are unable to form an answer to such questions, much less act on them, outside of their own desires or wills.

by objects, like the very novel the reader is reading. It is essential to understand that the narrator is bridging a gap between the dramatic elements of the story and the *story* of what is happening to the reader.[16]

In the narrative, the characters struggle with their identities—who am I and how did I become this person? The answer is unbelievably simple, yet impossible to change—the characters' are the people they fantasize about becoming, only their fantasies have led them into the unknown, and, as such, they are always evolving their fantasies to accommodate the unforeseen consequences of their actions being realized in their realities. Murdoch has written a story in which she describes a world without direct access to anything Real, there is only what one may imagine and what one has the strength to pursue, and while this may seem utopian on the outside, it becomes a hell for every character as they determine their desires have run amok

> Blaise had imagined himself before as inside a cage, and when he had felt nothing but the great blessed relief he had seemed to be out of it. But cages made of long wrong-doing are not so easily disposed of. Had he conceivably exchanged one cage for another? The deep falsity, the lie which Edgar had spoken, still existed. But what was it exactly, *where* was it, and what did he now want? Truth, freedom? Where were they, in which direction? (216-217)

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[16] Olsen claims fantasy begins in mimesis and introduces elements of the marvelous. This process creates a "stutter" in the discourse and results in confusion (for as long as the confusion of the two elements lasts—a phrase, page or entire novel) for the reader and protagonist so that he or she does not know where he is. Ultimately, Olsen claims fantasy is a deconstructive mode of narrative (19). In Murdoch's novel the confusion between reality and the marvelous—fantasy—occurs throughout the entire story, thus the reader may find him- or herself indefinitely trying to find a place in the novel. This kind of confusion leads to analysis—what is the author doing and how why am I affected? Thus, the element of fantasy itself leads the reader to construct an idea of how the characters' situations and construction of worlds is mimetic to one's own reality outside of fiction.

In this passage, the narrator relates Blaise's feelings that he has been trapped in a cage—in essence the world or reality of his own making—and it has become impossible for him to escape. He is recognizing the machine that controls him. Through this recognition, he experiences a tension with the world he has created for himself out of his fantasies and a world existing outside his own, perhaps like the one Žižek describes as the pre-logical Real. As such, he feels he is acting outside of expectations or ideals that seem to compose the idea of 'morality' or 'right'. However, such a tension cannot be resolved and thus can provide no comfort in his minor existential crisis because if one lived in Žižek's Real, there would be no concept of a *you* because the fantasies Blaise struggles with in his conscience are actually what make him an individual. This event in Blaise's mind may also parallel an exchange in the reader's life: choices have been made, paths have been created to follow, and life is essentially made up of one's desires. Consciously or unconsciously, those desires can create a cage that one is unable to leave because it is so elaborately constructed from fantasies developing since childhood from books, religion, friends, school, etc.[17]

Ultimately, Murdoch has built a novel in which forces that drive our desires and create reality from fantasy are thoroughly examined. However, the novel itself is an entity of those forces and that fact should create a measure of unease in the reader. But, while Murdoch has dramatized the result of the machine for literary pleasure and entertainment, she has also developed such a level of dramatization to ease the uncomfortable sensation the reader may develop through reading such an examination of their current activity. Murdoch is not trying to eliminate readers or write a

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[17] Kaehele and German insist Murdoch is concerned with existence and reality as concepts created "outside us" and that one's sense of being is both solipsistic and outside one's self (558). The argument is supported by Murdoch's novel, but existence and reality exist only in a 'pure' form when thought of in terms of Žižek's pre-logical Real—that is, before one's fantasies intertwine with reality. Essentially a 'pure' reality is one which *nothing* has interacted or been created. Once a subject begins to interact with others desires form and fantasy is created.

philosophical treatise on reality, but she does develop a novel in which the reader is directly confronted with their own activity and a version of how one becomes a self. As such, she is using the dramatization and repugnancy of the characters to create a balance so as not to dispose of readers while still allowing one to recognize one's part in the process she is describing in the story. Thus, while the outrageous characters and the narrative world present the author's philosophical quandary in a direct and provocative manner to the reader and ask that it be applied to his or her own life, those same characteristics of the writing provide a somewhat flimsy curtain over events in order for readers' minds to reconcile the idea that they are characters caught in the very same process as Murdoch's characters.

8. Conclusion: The Machine Revealed

Murdoch covers a broad entire spectrum of life in The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, and, from birth to death, the characters find themselves caught in a system they cannot explain or escape. Yet, the characters Murdoch creates are fully functioning adults. Even the children are portrayed with mature concerns and emotions, and, because of their genuine and familiar struggles with life, they are believable and have the reader's sympathy no matter the shocking and inconceivable situations that seem to develop around them. The difficulties the characters perpetuate in their own lives stems from their familiarity with particular subjects and experiences that leads to many desires all attempting to work in conjunction with one another to form the essence, not of a fantasy life, but of a fantastic reality the character is able to inhabit.

Murdoch's story revolves around a self-perpetuating machine that controls the characters' lives, loves, careers and friends; it is an extensive development of a narrative world as the characters navigate the construction of their own realities and maneuver around the machines in which other characters inhabit. The results of Blaise's machine

may begin the story, but it is the interaction that occurs between the characters' machines as the realities that have developed from them adjust to one another that Murdoch uses to concentrate the reader's attention. The machine is finally fully and wholly revealed to the reader when the moment occurs in one's mind that one is oneself partaking in an event that was responsible for part of the novel's tragedy. In The Sacred and Profane Love Machine, Murdoch is playing with the concept of a narrative world by creating a story in which the reader also inhabits the same world as the characters because the readers and characters share the same cognitive processes when reading literature and developing fantasy lives.

Reality is a painful apparition to the characters. It is something they have created for themselves out of selfish desires and long-established fantasy lives. When one of the characters achieves an epiphanal moment and suddenly gains the knowledge that life is spiraling out of control because of their desires, the knowledge never lasts long because the intense pain and stress that invoke the epiphanal light also create the urge to burrow under another fantasy. These short and intense moments of purification that occur for most of the characters seem the most lucid moments of the novel, but people do not live in constant pain and suffering, and thus Murdoch cannot keep her characters in such states that encourage the discovery of what Zizek describes as the pre-logical Real. Given the choice to be free and to create their own ideas of what their life should consist of, the characters choose to accept some loose definition of a central design of Fate which will *eventually* move them from the chaos their life drifts off towards and into a state of eventual happiness.

> One mustn't worry too much. All human solutions are temporary… one's ordinary tasks are usually immediate and simple and one's own truth lives in these tasks… always try to be lucid and quiet. There's a kind of pure

> speech of the mind which one must try to attain. To attain it is to be in the truth, one's own truth. (351)

Murdoch gives the most important lines of the novel to Edgar Demarney, a closeted homosexual doomed to forever yearn after love and pretend, even to himself, that he yearns for something altogether different. His epiphany occurs in the final pages of the novel, and his retreat back to the allurement of fantasy occurs just as swiftly and deeply as the moment of knowledge was gained.

The Sacred and Profane Love Machine is Murdoch's interpretation of the damaging forces of life that humans inflict upon themselves, forces that cannot be contained because one is not aware that they act on one's life—that they indeed form one's very life. The novel is a depiction of a society which allows everything because everything has been said, written, or depicted at one time. The deciding factor in the impact on the characters' lives is the question of which fantasies they find most alluring and thus pursue to such an extent as to incorporate them into their lives. In essence, Murdoch has taken the reality out of reality in this novel. She has granted her characters an immense amount of knowledge, yet they are unable to detach themselves from their own fantasies. Murdoch exploits our quest to find answers about ourselves and she portrays all of the delusions and hypocrisies that befall those who cannot separate themselves from their fantasies. This is a novel that demands as much from its reader as it demanded from its writer at conception; to approach this story one must acknowledge own's own role and, as such, acknowledge the frailty and danger of one's own human existence.

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